

Grace Works, Part 5 - Romans 4:18-21 - October 9th, 2011

- Today's teaching will be part "five" in a series I've chosen to title; "Grace Works," and in it, we will complete our study of this amazing chapter 4.
- I'll begin a little bit differently than usual, and commence with a question in the hopes that you'll taste how sweet the text we have before us is.
- Is there an impossible situation in your life right now that has become so bad that you're losing hope, and even losing your faith, because of it?

- If so, then I'd encourage you to give the Holy Spirit permission to replenish your heart with that depleted hope from the passage that's before us.
- Here's why I say that; I believe God has given to us "the key," and all we have to do is accept it, and put it on the keychain of our Christian lives.
- In other words, if we'll only take possession of that key, and the authority that comes with it, we can unlock the door of any impossible situation.

- Let me hasten to say, lest you say, that this sounds like one of those health and wealth, name it and claim it kind of teaching, it's absolutely not!
- I'm of the belief that much of the complexity and perplexity in our Christian experience is brought upon us, by us, and sadly, it's so unnecessary.
- I've experienced this in my own life, and I have the scars to prove it, we are truly our own worst enemy when it comes to simply believing God.

- At the risk of appearing as if I'm offering a simplistic answer to a serious problem, sometimes it's actually our unbelief that becomes the problem.
- We tie the hands of God's grace, with the ropes of our unbelief. We lose hope that God will do it, because we see how, or when, God will do it.
- It's for this reason that now the Apostle Paul can rise from these verses in this chapter, and demonstrate to us, how it is that God will do it for us.

8. Grace works when my hope in God is unwavering (Verses 18-21)

- v18 He tells them how Abraham, against all hope, in hope believed he'd become the father of many nations, just as it had been promised to him.
- v19 He says that without weakening in his faith, he faced the facts at 100 years of age that his body was as good as dead as was Sarah's womb.
- v20-21 Abrahams faith was unwavering and strengthened giving glory to God. He was fully persuaded God had the power to do as He promised.

- At first glance, this may seem disingenuous at best, and dishonest at worst, by virtue of how Abraham did seemingly waver in his faith in God.
- Isn't his weakened faith the reason he and his barren wife took matters in their own hands with Hagar who as a surrogate gave birth to Ishmael?
- It doesn't seem that Paul wants to draw too much attention to Abraham's unbelief when God comes to him after Ishmael had already been born.

Genesis 17:15-19 NIV God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. (16) I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." (17) Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (18) And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" (19) Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

- It would seem from this account in Genesis, that Abraham is really wavering in his faith when actually laugh's, to himself, about God doing this.
- You'd think that in light of Abraham's unbelief God wouldn't give him Isaac, and Paul certainly wouldn't portray Abraham as unwavering in faith.
- Matthew's gospel is of no help to us either, because in it, we read of an account where Jesus seems to heal two blind men based on their faith.

Matthew 9:27-30 NIV As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (28) When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. (29) Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; (30) and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this."

James 1:5-8 NIV (5) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (6) But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (7) That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

- So how is it, and why is it, that Paul would paint Abraham on the canvass of unwavering belief and unflinching hope in Isaac's birth by Sarah?
- The answer to this, just so happens to also be the lesson in this. It's woven into the tapestry of how we, like Abraham can in the end, have hope.
- I would suggest that prior to the work of God's grace, at work, in their lives, Romans chapter four would have been written about someone else.

- Notice in Genesis how God takes the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and puts it in the fifth place in the name of Abram, and then of Sarai.
- Also, it's important to know that God does this before Isaac is born miraculously by Sarah, when it would have been impossible at their age.
- There's a perfect and supernatural order to how God does, what God does, and it's ever so beautifully portrayed in the power of God's grace.

Five is the number of grace which is why God changes Abram and Sarai's name, and in so doing He changes their nature
Five is the total number of the books of Moses, known as the Pentateuch, and they declare the nature of God's goodness and grace
Five commandments on two tablets with the fifth commandment being the only one with a promise of grace
Five fingers and toes on two hands and feet, along with our five senses denote man being created in the image and the nature of God
Five offerings were given on the Altar of Sacrifice in the Tabernacle
Five smooth stones saved the Israelites from the Philistines by the grace of God through David defeating Goliath
Five books are contained in the Psalms closing with the doxology and they parallel the five books of Moses proclaiming the grace of God
Five is the number that Noah, Ruth, and David are mentioned as it relates to finding grace in the eyes of God the fifth time their name is listed
Five women are listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 1
Five books were written by the Apostle John, all of which are a declaration of God's grace towards those who believe in Jesus Christ
Five porches were at the pool of Bethesda found in John 5, where people came to be healed because of God's grace
Five ministries through which God's grace is revealed are listed in Ephesians 4:11
Five times only, in Romans 11:5-6, does the Apostle Paul use the word grace, and four times only the word works is used in just that chapter
Five virgins are saved in Matthew 25:1-13 when Jesus taught the parable of the ten Bridesmaids

- Here's the bottom line; the reason that nothing we try works, and nothing changes, is because it's only God's grace that works when it changes.
- Maybe you're like me and sometimes you feel like you don't have Abraham's faith. Abraham didn't have faith before receiving the grace of God.
- We are saved by grace first, before it's through faith that we receive the gift of God, not of works lest any of us could boast that it was our works.

- This is how grace works and the way grace works. God's gift of grace changes me from the inside out. It comes packaged with unwavering faith.
- This fills in more of the blanks, and connects more of the dots in what we saw in James 2:17 where he says that faith without works is dead.
- It's not a contradiction, it's a confirmation in that, first comes the changing work of grace, through faith. When grace works, then faith works also.

1 Corinthians 15:10 NIV (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

- We are given this template of grace throughout the pages of Holy Writ. God's grace isn't based on my faith, God's grace is the base for my faith.
- Let me say the same thing a different way; like Abraham, I too can have unwavering faith, when I too am the recipient of God's changing grace.
- This explains why Paul writes this of Abraham. Grace changes me from unbelief to belief, from faithless to faithful, and from hopeless to hopeful.